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ABSTRACT

The changing meaning of equity and assessment is traced in the context of a shift from the hegemony of a market discourse to an emergent "conversation" centered around relationships and community. The weakening position of the state and the market through global socioeconomic transformation sets loose a search for alternatives, which ends up "backing into" community. As the market-driven definitions of equity and assessment lose their moorings, alternative constructs emerge. The new conversation locates equity and assessment within the learning process itself, as adjuncts to the creation of a community of learners. After exploring the contours of the new community conceptually, programmatic suggestions are offered for structuring outcomes assessment in higher education in ways supportive of equity and community building. (Contains 40 references.) (Author/SLD)

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BACKING INTO COMMUNITY: A RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF EQUITY AND ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

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The authors trace the changing meaning of equity and assessment, in the context of a shift from the hegemony of a market discourse to an emergent "conversation" centered around relationships and community. The weakening position of the state and the market through global socio-economic transformation sets loose a search for alternatives, which ends up "backing into" community. As the market driven definitions of equity and assessment lose their moorings, alternative constructs emerge. The new conversation locates equity and assessment within the learning process itself, as adjuncts to the creation of communities of learners. After exploring the contours of the new community conceptually, the authors conclude with programmatic suggestions for structuring outcomes assessment in higher education in ways supportive of equity and community building.

BACKING INTO COMMUNITY: A RECONCEPTUALIZATION

OF EQUITY AND ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Our concepts of equity have been informed largely by the principles of distributive justice, which pertains to the fair distribution of social goods. Accordingly, education is seen as either one of the social goods that should be distributed fairly among a citizenry, or as a mechanism which helps even the chances of all citizens, regardless of background, in competing for other social goods. These are usually material, but may also include "goods" such as power and status. In to the first case education is a good in itself, while in the second it becomes a means to an end. Although the language of the last forty years, starting with the 1954 Supreme Court decision in Brown v. the Topeka Board of Education on the inherent inequality of separate schooling, has stressed equal education as an intrinsic value, the social context that claimed education as a "ticket" to social mobility and good jobs has made the instrumental approach to educational equity dominate the conversation.

Additionally, discussions of equity have been influenced by the market mentality that dominates our culture and constructs life issues in terms of "free" choices among existing (and ready-made) goods. Whether the issue relates to work, education, politics, nation, neighborhood, or even the family, freedom is construed, in consumer fashion, as a choice among a series of already existing options, approached in a "take it or leave it" fashion that largely eliminates from consideration the alternative of changing these environments from within.

It is a rather short step from the market approach to educational equity to assessment as the categorizing and certifying tool we know it to be. In the market, equity is pursued by two means: ensuring that some "producers" do not have unfair advantage over others (that is, that the playing field is level), and that "consumers" have the wherewithal to make informed decisions among products--for instance, through such practices as "truth-in-labeling." In the educational market, this translates, first, into traditional educational access programs for the "unfairly" disadvantaged, such as compensatory education and desegregation, and, second, into assessment serving as a quality control mechanism for the benefit of consumers. There are a number of consumers to be satisfied: employers needing well-educated workers; taxpayers concerned about costs and benefits; students and their parents trying to choose wisely among institutions; and the larger society, which is supposedly best served when the goals of equity and excellence work in tandem.

Equity, then, is a two-sided construct consisting, on the one hand, of basic, equalizing supports for the disadvantaged, and on the other hand, of a screening device sifting out those who, in spite of those supports, do not succeed. In the market, equity does not mean equality, as some are naturally less endowed, less motivated, less responsible than others. Thus what the market gives with one hand, it takes back with the other, stigmatizing in the process: <u>we</u> gave you access, but <u>you</u> did not make it.

Such logic, though still widely accepted, has come under

serious scrutiny. Some of the critics insist that we look inside, at the workings of the institutions themselves: how open and welcoming do they continue to be, beyond admission? Do they discriminate in subtle ways, by constructing "glass ceilings," holding differential expectations, valuing some learnings and experiences while ignoring or devaluing others, and defining and measuring success according to these biased standards? These claims that access to institutions does not preclude the inequitable distribution of institutional rewards are still couched in the language of instrumental equity. Other critics raise still more fundamental questions: about the place and role of "non-traditional" students in the university and in the society at large; about the canon, and what passes for knowledge.

As we write, traditional notions of equity are being expanded and modified by the proliferation of "voices" and "conversations" from the margins. Our reconceptualization must take place within the general debate throughout society about marginalized "others"--women, African-Americans, Latinos, gays, children, students, the poor--whose subjectivities are left out of the operating principles of society. That is, the reality that is considered functional relegates their interests and epistemological claims to the sidelines--if it considers them at all. Equity as access may allow them entrance, but more as guests than as full participants. The power relationship here may be genteelly disguised but it operates nonetheless: participation is premised on assimilation; voices outside the mainstream are essentially silenced, as what is deemed "good for the students" is built into the complex agenda of learning.

This expanded conception of equity cannot easily be addressed through existing mechanisms which focus on individual rights and provide for redress through legal or semi-legal processes.[1] Our paper makes a case for an alternative focus on "relationships" and "community," not as a new model, but as a an attempt to add a dimension to the dialogue. According to this alternative, education is not--or at least not only--a social good to be consumed, nor a means to social ends, but an end in itself, an exploration of our worlds and ourselves-in-relation, facilitated by those who have walked further along this exploratory path. Equity therefore requires a new understanding of what constitutes meaningful knowledge and appropriate relationships between learners and teachers. It requires that institutions, curricula, the instructional process, and assessment change in ways that accommodate and make room for marginalized "voices" and worlds. We need a new conception of equity that locates the marginalized within a community of learning and creates or strengthens mechanisms that allow them appropriate ways to speak in their own voices.[2] And we need a new conception of assessment that makes it less a tool for certification and more an adjunct of such communities.

This paper offers a starting point from which to reconceptualize equity and assessment. Our first task is to provide a sketch, from a bird's eye view and necessarily brief, of current circumstances which support such a project. We find support in the fact that American society is in the midst of a general crisis, that is erupting at the level of culture, economics, and institutions, and that manifests itself, in part,

through the erosion of old social arrangements and the emergence of new forms. The crisis provides an opening for change which, as is true of all human matters, may follow any number of paths, some quite desirable, others far less so.

Since we take the position that human agency can shape the direction of such change, our second task is to explore the key mechanisms and practices that may be set in place to provide support for the new equity. In particular, we will address the potential of outcomes assessment for supporting this project in higher education. While the most visible origins of outcomes assessment policies lie in pressures for accountability and reflect market and consumerist conceptions of education, the movement has another, well-developed orientation that insists on the vital link between assessment, appropriately designed and conducted, and improvements in programs and student learning (Hutchings and Marchese, 1990; Keith, 1991). When undertaken as part of a "conversation about learning," outcomes assessment has consequences for the very culture of academe, potentially enhancing and supporting the faculty's commitment to students and the students' commitment to learning, thus building the collaborative relationships that foster community. Our exploration builds on this second face of assessment.

Equity: Individual Rights and the Flight from Community

Most contemporary gains for equity, defined as equal access and sought through programs such as desegregation, affirmative action, special tuition assistance, equal school funding, and compensatory education, have been made by invoking the concept of

rights and demanding that government (through legislation, the courts, and regulatory and budgetary means) protect and enforce equal rights. The successes secured for equity by such appeals have not been insignificant, but the approach also has its limitations. For one, government action does not exist in a power vacuum but is dependent on the constant prodding and watchfulness of the immediate beneficiaries of equity and on the acquiescence or resistance of power holders. For another, the reach of government properly lies outside the educational process itself.

To contextualize these limitations, we need to consider the historical relationship between equity, the state, and the political economy. The proliferation and progressive extension of individual rights over the last two centuries is not an isolated event, but is inextricably tied to the success of a liberal project that emphasized what C. B. MacPherson (1962) terms "possessive individualism" and Robert Bellah (1975) dubs "utilitarian individualism." Liberalism theorizes the individual as the basic unit of society and construes individuals as "seek[ing] to further their own interests, defined in terms of measured net wealth positions in politics as in other aspects of their behaviour." (Peters and Marshall, 1993:20). A result, as Bellah (1975) reminds us, is the cultural legitimation of "unbridled passions" and a lack of commitment to common good. Of course, this is not only a matter of philosophy, morality, or psychology. The enormous success of the liberal-capitalist economy encouraged people to insist on--even to invent--their rights. The economy's ability to generally satisfy material

needs facilitated the subsequent translation of these needs into more abstract wants, expressed in terms that might be alternatively political, economic, aesthetic, or legal. The process was anchored to the demands of increasing economic output and correspondingly insistent on individual possessiveness and autonomy (see Xenos, 1987).

Material plenty and flourishing individualism also meant that the market, with its penchant for reducing human action to rational calculation and self-interested choice, progressively encroached on all human endeavors and eroded community. From different sides of the political spectrum, there is wide agreement that the personal sphere, in which "sympathy," altruism, cooperation, and the ties of community might once flourish, shrunk and withered under the onslaught of commodification (Bellah et al, 1985). Marx's words continue to ring true today: "The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more goods he creates. The devaluation of the human world increases in direct relation with the increase in value of the world of things."[3] The gains in individual freedom from the bonds of community--and its frequent tyranny--should not be minimized; but they were purchased at the expense (note our language!) of diminished human relationships. Pre-nuptial contracts and educational malpractice suits say something about the bitter-sweet nature of rights and freedom versus trust and relationships. It is the latter that now have to be regained, within the context of a new, more equitable, equation.

The economic and personal gains of the period did not eliminate inequity entirely. In fact, as our earlier discussion

of market definitions of equity suggests, to do so was never part of the liberal project, which was much more adept at justifying state activism on the grounds of economic growth and efficiency than on the intrinsic good of promoting social welfare (see Jordan, 1989: 14). Liberalism differs from its conservative progenitor in terms of the level of inequality it deems acceptable, not with regard to its very existence. Writing while the industrial world was still struggling with a devastating depression, John Maynard Keynes professed the belief that there was "social and psychological justification for significant inequalities of incomes and wealth, but not for such large disparities as exist today" (Keynes, 1936: 374).[4]

The problem of continuing inequity is now compounded, as the golden age of "possessive individualism" has drawn to a close. It is now generally agreed that the steady decline of global economic growth since the early 1970s constitutes a qualitative break with the past. The current "recessionist" trend has little to do with the business cycle, whose negative effects were temporary and could be corrected through the principles of equilibrium built into our economic models and formulations. Rather, factors such as the depletion of non-renewable resources on which modern industries depend, the process of de-industrialization causing jobs to leave the metropolitan ("Western") economies, and the ecological crisis have forced the immediate scaling back of the processes on which Western affluence depended. There is a great deal of unanimity among economists of all persuasions on the long-term prognosis of zero to minimal economic growth (Offe & Heinze, 1992). The terse and

unequivocal message is that old ways of understanding and approaching equity will have to be reevaluated against the backdrop of the new economic realities.

The new economy speaks of an increasing conflict between individual rights and economic "rights" (interests), with economic rights having the upper hand. This conflict can be seen in many guises: Proposition 13 and other taxpayer "revolts" across the country, the disappearing "safety net," the repeated sacrifice of environmental and health standards to business profitability, reverse discrimination cases, the low-budget, high-visibility excellence push in education. In this context, compensatory and other programs addressing equity as access are sacrificed,[5] while there is an increased stridency about public demands--emitted especially from business interests--for the public's version of "equity," that is, the excellence of educational <u>results</u>.

It was to be predicted that the economic slowdown, which further reflected negatively on equity issues, would somehow work itself into the realm of educational management. It appeared, in fact, in the form of accountability demands, at which point outcomes assessment made its entrance. Let us elaborate a little on the related issues.

Much of the educational reform of the 1980s centered around the pressure by economic interests on the educational establishment to enlist its support in the quest of regaining competitive advantage. Education's role was to "produce" a workforce whose knowledge and skills would help the United States "become a nation of people who think for a living."[6]

Deregulation and the "new orthodoxy" of the market made the market version of outcomes assessment (that is, assessment for the purpose of controlling the quality of results) the logical policy choice.[7] State mandates requiring colleges to provide public data on the learning of their students proliferated, so that by 1990 four-fifths of the states were promoting outcomes assessment and 82 percent of institutions reported having various kinds of assessment programs underway.[8] While the access side of equity was in retreat, its "excellence" side, with assessment in tow, was on the upswing.

In the end, however, these events spoke of a weaker state role in legislating and implementing social policies. The retreat on access was no surprise: since the state's stance on equity as a social good was ambivalent even in times of plenty, one could hardly expect it to be a pillar of strength in changing times. The judicial branch may continue to play a significant role in the case of redress for individual rights, but it does so in the face of the decreasing willingness and ability of the executive to enforce court decisions that require a budgetary outlay. The upsurge of excellence through assessment was an attempt to use the "bully pulpit" and forge a new accountability relying less on the meager resources of a dwindling fiscus and more on the market.

The increasing weakness of the state leads to the posing of fundamental and pervasive questions concerning its regulation of social relations and its role in the economy and society. Why, for instance, the new orthodoxy asks, should we continue to look to government to intervene in the economic and social spheres,

when its record in this area is mixed at best?[9] And if government cannot ensure equity for all, why not rely on the market, which in the end may not leave us any worse off? Solutions that rely only on one or the other of these two social formulas (corporatism or libertarianism) loom as increasing threats to democracy. They are not the answer. These constitute blinkered views, seemingly incapable of grasping solutions outside of well worn and exhausted definitional trammels. We ask: is reality to be construed as inhabiting only these two problem-ridden choices?

Seen in this context, the multiplying calls for personal involvement, social service, community and family responsibility, volunteerism, speak of attempts to revive "communal" ways of relating, to reactivate and restructure the private sphere, so as to fill the voids left by the retreating government, stagnant economy, and the ethos of possessive individualism. While some of these calls seem self-serving and callous--those cast out to sea are urged to a quick do-it- yourself course on swimming--it is unquestionable that circumstances are pushing us in these directions. These trends were partly captured by the "second wave" of educational reforms in the late 1980s, which saw the emergence of a greater voice for teachers, the proliferation of interest in teacher-made, authentic assessments, "family schools," and, in general, the seeking of reform alternatives within the ambit of community moreso than bureaucratic regulation. What this trend meant for the market model of assessment will become clearer as we take up that analysis in later sections of the paper.

Equity and Rights: Backing into Community

We are moving toward a qualitatively new era, and from this perspective it is difficult to predict what role the state will play in the future regarding of equity. It is unclear, for instance, whether highly visible events such as tax revolts, resistance to affirmative action, and the increase of "bias" incidents and violence speak of an overall, long-term erosion of public support for equity, sparked in part by economic austerity. We do not deny the presence of these trends, but neither do we see them as the only reality.

In the abandoned cities of industrialized countries, as well as in the Third World, there are, along with the devastation, signs of grass-roots activism and self-help, both economic and social, taking such forms as anti-drug community efforts, "informal" economic activities, micro-businesses and the like.[10] The new economy which will, by all accounts, swell the ranks of the disadvantaged, should provide additional scope to collective social action.

In political life, the Green Party, the "antipolitics" of some social movements, the weakening of traditional politics (including the increase of "independents") all carry new possibilities as alternative forms of collective expression.[11] The Green Party presents an especially interesting case of participation in conventional politics while resorting to unconventional strategies: they elected candidates to the European parliament committed to narrow communitarian interests.

New approaches to the project of equity are actually emerging, that combine political action in and around the state,

state action, and community building. On the one hand, attempts to reconceptualize the relationship between the market and the state continue. Robert Reich (1988: 224), for instance, suggests that the government concern itself with "designing the right market rules, rather than trying to dictate the right market results."[12] But, among these, there are also more radical, less state-oriented proposals. Bruyn, for instance, sees the state in the role of promoter of "self-regulated" economic organizations that favor social justice:

> The new economic order does not eliminate the market or the state in their essential form but totally reverses their character and function.... The purpose of the state should not be to regulate the economy but rather to enable it to regulate itself and become accountable to the people it affects. The state's primary role should not be to govern corporations but to promote incentives for them to provide their own system of social justice and equity. (1987: 6-7)

Indeed these ideas are far from being visionary and impractical; they are already being translated into practice, albeit in germinal fashion. Examples can be found in the alternatives that have been emerging from within the old order, as organization and individuals attempt to cope with change by redefining their perception of themselves and of their interests; in the process, they are moving toward more collaborative types of organization, shaking the foundation (however imperceptibly) of the prevailing liberal discourse and its conception of individual self-interests and market calculations as the motor

force of society.

For some time, a number of corporations have been developing workers' teams and "flattening" their hierarchical organization.[13] Schools are urged to engage in similar transformations, as the "second phase" of reform partly replaces bureaucratic mandates with the entreaty to engage in organizational restructuring. Some universities have implemented degrees that foster "self-management" rather than just "management."[14] Change models call for the "re-visioning" of relationships, values, and organizational culture.[15] Feminists are reframing democracy and participation with emphasis on diversity (Phillips, 1993). In concert, assessment models have become more participatory and collaborative, often being linked to shared visions emphasizing learning for all students.

Assessment Redefined

Although assessment first reached national prominence as a creature of the new, market-oriented accountability, its proponents could not keep it from being redefined for long. Here and below we trace the path that took it from the market discourse, to a professional redefinition, and finally, via the back door, to community. The events we have discussed so far should point to some of the causes for this shifting understanding of assessment and its purposes.

Through a process discussed elsewhere by Novella Keith (1991), academics began by responding proactively to the state mandates of the 1980s, and ended by reconceptualizing the call for assessment of outcomes into an agenda more in line with their

interests and values. They accepted the new orthodoxy's critique of education, but proffered solutions that focused on professional rather than market-based accountability. Integrity in the College Curriculum, for instance, noted the "scandalous" absence of methods of institutional and social accountability in American higher education, proposing, however, that these same institutions themselves develop "evaluations that the public can respect" (AAC, 1985: 33). In his book Higher Learning, Derek Bok gave assessment the Harvard imprimatur, legitimating its place in the academy by linking it to the curriculum:

> efforts to improve our colleges have produced only modest results in helping students progress toward the academic goals of a liberal education.... [These] findings are not terribly surprising.... The fact remains that the time faculties and administrators spend working together on education is devoted almost entirely to considering what their students should study rather than how they can learn more effectively or whether they are learning as much as they should. The professors who vote for new majors or curricular reforms know very little about whether these initiatives will actually help students progress toward the educational goals of the institution. And rarely, if ever, do they make a serious effort to find out. (Bok, 1986: 57-58)

In this reshaping, assessment is defined as serving purposes that are central to academic life, supporting the faculty's reflection on good teaching and learning (see, for instance, Rowntree, 1987; Alverno College, 1976, 1985). Learning outcomes train the

faculty's sights on those broad, meaningful aspects of learning and development that occur as the result of several courses or an entire program of study (for instance, applying a method of inquiry to various fields of knowledge or developing a sense of social responsibility and appreciation for diversity). These features make it into an integrating tool lending intentionality and direction to the curriculum and potentially fostering collaboration among the faculty and students.[16] Thus these solutions opened the door to the creation of new communities inside the academy.

Raising the possibility of involving communities (teachers, students, counselors) intimately in the learning process, outcomes assessment provides the opportunity to integrate issues of community and equity in a dynamic way. It is in this context that the plurality of 'voices' (African-American, Latinos, women, for example) and 'conversations' can, in part, satisfy the need to declare and help to define their complex and urgent Otherness. This is a qualitative dimension of equity which can hardly be left to the state or market forces.

A shift from what we have termed "assessment as measurement" to "assessment as conversation" was well on the way (Keith, 1991). The first has its principal focus on the technical task of designing psychometrically sound instruments, primarily for the purpose of producing a "report card," whose purpose is aligned to the market: it is to rank and sort. Here, it is mainly technical expertise that is needed. The second insists that assessment be an integral part of the learning process, that its purpose be to enhance both learning and the curriculum. This

focus recognizes the complexity of the web connecting measurement and improvements and the crucial role that collegial inquiry must play in the process of discovery and "solution." Unlike the first, this approach puts a premium on the organizational and human relations skills (relationships) that involve people in a "conversation" about teaching and learning and promote shared responsibility for students.

Community, Equity, and the State: Once More

The new types of political and social action, the emphasis on collaboration within organizations, all these find an echo in the feminist assertion of the importance of relationships as opposed, or perhaps in addition, to rights. Somewhere in these groping attempts at change are the germs of the new theory and practice of community. In fact, this is a case of theory trying to catch up with practice, so as to illuminate its present directions and, perhaps, serve as a guide toward preferable futures.

If we suggest the "new" community as the carrier of equity, we do so not only because of the limitations on state action outlined above, but also because regulatory or legal approaches to equity are not as successful in addressing the substance of education, once access has been achieved. There are areas important to learning that cannot be legislated, that have to do with relationships, mentoring, opportunities opened or closed--these have public effects, but appear to belong more to the private sphere. As Goodlad (1990: 17) observes,

> Laws against discriminatory arrangements in schools are not likely to put an end to them; too many subtle ways to subvert such laws are available. And laws are unlikely to increase understanding of human learning and sound educational concepts, change attitudes and values, and develop moral sensitivities pertaining to human rights.

Governments must continue to be supported in their ability to intervene in cases of gross breaches in the provision of justice, services, and opportunities for discriminated groups and individuals. But we cannot count on government with regard to those everyday events and relationships that, in the end, have as much or more to do with equity. Indeed, if government were to become the only guarantor of rights (which, according to our analysis is hardly possible), it would mean that civility--the very basis for living together in society--is threatened. So we must think about equity as the work of communities, over and beyond the sphere of the state.

Advancing the notion of equity as the primary work of communities does not and could not eliminate the need for government action as one of three carriers of change: political action, community building, and state action. At bottom, much of the present crisis still has to do with the fiscal abandonment of the poor, which is technically in the purview of state power, although practically less and less so, given the fiscal crisis. The three may work in concert, as, for instance, when government, mediating the demands of a social movement, uses its power to prod an organization into action, while a "community" inside that organization responds. Working "in concert" does not mean, of

course, that there is a harmony of interests and absence of conflict within and among these three social arenas.

Equity and Assessment in the "New" Community

Although the concept of community is enjoying a renewal, this reflects less a clear sense of the meaning of the concept than a recognition of the bankruptcy of present modes of association. In this climate of change, there are strong tendencies to resolve uncertainties by invoking traditional definitions of community, based on homogeneity, custom, and accepted authority structures. These communities still exist, for instance, in some religious orders and colleges that retain the vestiges of the "collegial" model. Yet the search for individual rights--those of women being perhaps the most prominent here--has intruded on this world, exposing the tyranny behind the facade of consensus and harmony. We cannot "go home" to this type of community, regardless of the nostalgia.

Trying to recreate it will only result in a second type of community, in which homogeneity and shared values are not natural, but are enforced by and built around an authoritarian or charismatic leader. Here culture is forcibly re-homogenized, with those at the authoritarian pinnacle dictating the acceptable traditions and values. In education, this conceptualization of community is reflected in calls for "cultural literacy" (see Hirsch, others), the attack on "political correctness," and the national goals and assessment of the America 2000 Project. This is the danger against which Agnes Heller warns us, that in trying to revive community, we might also revive patriarchy and its

tyranny.[17]

The question, then, is how to create community in diversity. It is the question that first prompted the study of "society" as an entity--and the founding of the field of sociology. The answer proposed then and now was interdependence, but what a problem-ridden undertaking it was! The social cohesion of modern society (Toennies' "Gesellschaft" and Durkheim's "organic solidarity") was based on complementarity and diversity--that is, role specialization, including social differentiation by class, gender, and race: brain and brawn were equally needed, if not equally rewarded! But since this "diversity" militated against the maintenance of a common outlook, values, history, traditions, interests (Toennies' "Gesellschaft" and Durkheim's "mechanical solidarity"), the community could always be torn asunder by conflict.

A "new" community now appears to be emerging. In order to see its possibilities, we must eschew linear or circular thinking, and envision it not as the antithesis or restoration of the old, but perhaps, as Richard Falk suggests, as "the implications of past and future in the present" (1992: 16). Considering embryonic emergent models, new communities might combine limited common norms and values (including notions of responsibility), individual rights and freedom (especially those that cannot be legislated or codified), and authority based on knowledge and experience. As with all emergent phenomena, we can only perceive its features in vague outlines.

The lively debate on the theory of community that is currently taking place among communitarians, liberals,

libertarians, and so on, can hardly have escaped anyone's notice. Briefly, the debate assumes two broad approaches. The first is a careful analysis of the minutiae of concepts, often very abstract; second, urgent, concrete attempts to grapple with problems in an earnest search for solutions. We think the latter approach is more fruitful. We have opted to draw on one theorist, Bill Jordan, whose writings in The Common Good; Citizenship, Morality, and Self-Interest come closest to our views and provide some encouraging ways to approach the question at hand.

Between the atomistic "freedom" (choice) of the market and the totalistic community of the past, Jordan finds the possibility for interdependence and mutuality by asking when individual interests might coincide with the interests of others. It is precisely this coincidence of interests, and not the sacrifice of one's interests for the common good, that forms the foundation of a good community. A society or community, then, must be consciously organized so as to enable its members to have such common interests. But what are these interests? For Jordan, our interests and those of others are not separate or separable and thus they are not known except through interaction with others. Market relations remove us from the consequences our choices have for others, and thus behaving as independent, self-interested individuals does not impugn our rationality. However, this is not possible when we act as members of groups or communities:

> Because my actions do affect others, and theirs me, I must engage in a public dialogue about our lives together to

> discover what is possible, what is desirable and what the likely consequences of my actions are... there is no way of knowing my own interests before I have this dialogue, because any choices I make in ignorance of their projects and purposes may have all sorts of unintended consequences. Until I debate and negotiate with others, and coordinate my choices with theirs, I will not be able to follow my interests or act rationally." (Jordan, 1989: 162-63)

What this passage suggests is that our self-interests are intimately bound with those of others. In all except (perhaps) market relations, the individual is a fiction: we exist in relationship with those who share our social environment. A good society, involves dialogue and "cooperation between people whose quality of life depends on each other's actions" (p. 159). This point might be a piece of casuistry as long as the state and market dominated human relations. The changes we have discussed in this paper, however, put it in a new light.

To this point, we have discussed equity and assessment in general terms, as a "conversation" and the establishment of relationships across diversity; we have defined equity as the inclusion of diverse voices and worlds into the educational conversation; and we have suggested that outcomes assessment might provide a structure through which the voice of the Other may become an integral part of this conversation.[18]

We have not yet demonstrated precisely how assessment might enter this nexus, nor how the two concepts relate to community as discussed above. After all, conversations structured for diversity may take many forms; and one might argue that special

centers for minority affairs, for instance, or certain approaches to student advising, or mentoring programs might advance equity just as well or better than assessment. What, then, justifies our linking these three concepts, and through what kinds of connections might they mutually support one another?

Outcomes assessment, as we suggested above, has gone through two definitional stages on its way to becoming a potential adjunct of equity as community-in-diversity: a market model and a professional one. The professional model provides support for a sense of community chiefly among the faculty and perhaps with a number of students, but does not specifically address equity. Before we approach an answer to our questions, we need to review how this model works to support community, in ways that traditional educational arrangements do not.

Assessment typically includes several steps, each of which provides an opportunity for faculty and student exchanges about knowledge, curriculum, and learning. It thus provides a space for a faculty conversation about teaching.[19] The process usually begins with a department's or school's faculty, together with alumni, students, and others, engaging in discussion and reflection designed to elicit the most important learning and developmental outcomes students will attain at the end of their studies. Unlike the typical statements of goals found in college bulletins, which are lofty and mostly forgotten, these goals constitute a foundation for the curriculum, which students and faculty may review to ensure it supports students' attainment of the desired outcomes. (The curriculum thus acquires more intentionality and coherence--<u>not</u> more rigid control!)

Reviewing the curriculum is different from the typical course evaluation, since, for instance, it allows one to address "silences" and "absences" in and across courses (based on the stated outcomes), and actual course contents, as well as instruction. Positive consequences in terms of curriculum integration may, of course, be overshadowed by fears of loss of faculty autonomy. Clearly in view is the shadowing encroachment of community, of practices going perhaps further than one might have wished in an unforeseen direction; "backing into it" may carry the connotation of serendipitous discovery, but also of accident and damage and loss of control. We will return to this below.

Finally, the student assessments assembled for program evaluation purposes are approached in a formative (that is, improvement oriented) rather than summative way (that is, making a final judgment), asking what was learned, what contributed to the learning, and what might be done to further enhance learning. Thus the process eschews (or at least minimizes) the ranking and labeling of students. Assessments may include student work completed to fulfill course requirements (perhaps collected in a portfolio), as well as additional work undertaken for program evaluation (for instance, an essay embedded in a course examination; a survey; an exit interview). This allows the conversation to be informed by developmental variables that would not normally figure in course assessment, such as attitudes, as well as strictly academic learning.

This process has several advantages over other programs with the potential of enhancing equity, although it should not replace

them. First, integration into an ongoing program review locates it at the very heart of academe--the academic department. There is a place, of course, for "special" programs, for the purposeful separation from the mainstream without which new voices may not be raised at all; but, ultimately, efforts need to be directed at changing the mainstream by inserting new voices into ongoing institutional procedures. Second, potentially all students may be affected, and not only those who participate in special programs. This means all students who are, in some or several ways, diverse, as well as "majority" students, whose understanding of and respect for diversity are needed not only to secure a supporting campus climate,[20] but also to affect future generations of teachers, employers, and citizens.[21] Finally, it can provide a clear focus and sense of purpose for a variety of initiatives (and those involved in them) that might otherwise be unconnected and seemingly impossible of achievement.[22] We are not speaking here of the technocratic language of efficiency and avoidance of duplication--although those may also become significant issues. Rather, we see the main effects of these connections in their embeddedness within purposive communities and supportive social networks. Without these, they will likely fall under the spell of instrumental reason--still the dominant discourse--thereby losing their essence.

We can now return to Jordan's insights about community, examining, first, the common interests that might facilitate a joining of the faculty, and of faculty and students (from both mainstream and marginalized groups), in communities. Readers should appreciate the important fact that, although we provide

some examples of possible common interests, these may vary with each group and thus need to be discovered through conversation. There are also different "disinterests" that have to be overcome, which leads to the second task. Having provided our examples, we must suggest the mechanisms (in our case, particular aspects of assessment) through which faculty and students will understand and articulate (and therefore follow) their mutual interests.

Faculty have considerable common interest in a conversation about student learning, although they are not necessarily fully aware of them. Two instances will suffice. First, the nature of learning is cumulative and often sequential, with courses building on one another. Fragmentation and isolation can cause considerable frustration, while their opposite may do much to enhance the quality of departmental life (also an interest). Second, discussions of pedagogy are useful professionally and can be intellectually stimulating.

The entire assessment process provides a good mechanism through which faculty may discover such common interests. Yet, what of the issue of faculty autonomy we raised above? In the course of the conversation, faculty may discover that the loss entailed by collaboration is not as great as they had feared and is outweighed by the gains attendant to it. For instance, student outcomes do not have to take over the entire curriculum and should leave room for each faculty member's conception of what is worth teaching; the conversation about teaching may itself lead to reconceptualizations of each faculty member's potential contributions; and one might begin with small, relatively non-threatening efforts addressing improvements in

student learning areas in which all faculty have an interest.

In addition, faculty may have an apparent or latent common interest--which may be affirmed through the conversation--in the role of education in society, in addressing, in whatever small ways, the pressing needs for equity. Interests should not be conceived as being purely immediate and personal and are affected by wider social and historical circumstances. The crisis and the retreat of market relations to which we alluded in our discussion of the current global shift has and will affect the perceptions of individual and common interests. For instance, the earlier relative freedom of faculty to move from one institution to another would support the perception of one's interest in terms of market choices among institutions. The present "stuckness" in a home institution may cause this focus to shift, contributing to increased interest in the quality of life there, in contributing to positive change within.

Faculty and students have an obvious common interest, as their roles are mutually interdependent. However, this usually involves one faculty member and his/her students. Students as a group may find common interests with faculty as a group around the issue of the quality of teaching and learning, the contents (in part) of courses and the curriculum, enhancing the quality of life in a department (for both students and faculty), and gaining a deeper understanding of one another. These interests apply to both mainstream and marginalized students, although, especially with the latter, the mechanisms for their exploration will require considerably more thought. Generally, since all students experience some level of silencing vis-a-vis the faculty,

inviting them to the membership of an assessment committee may not work, at least initially, while less formal approaches may bear more fruit. The data collection part of the assessment process itself (for instance, interviews, self-assessments, journal writing) might provide a place to begin a conversation.

These efforts at finding common ground need to be informed by an understanding of--borrowing from the writing of Nicholas Burbules and Suzanne Rice--the process and potential pitfalls of dialogue across differences.[23] What follows is in the form of some interrelated issues and tentative notes for a beginning.

The development of relationships. Instrumental reason still dominates the prevailing discourse and must be countered by careful consideration of the modes of relating that have structured silences and fractured communication, thus standing in the way of participation and the development of relationships. We agree with Burbules and Rice that "it is not enough merely to create the conditions of a forum in which all parties present have the right to speak." Rather, circumstances call for alertness to the hidden norms "that rule certain areas of concern and modes of speech out of bounds" (1991: 397). In particular, all participants come to the table with different knowledge and experiences that are important to the building of community. The faculty are not all-around experts, but bring a particular kind of knowledge to the group. Thus these are not equal relationships but neither are they authoritarian ones.

The rules of interaction. Conversation across diversity must reckon with stereotypes and the feelings and resentments created in the course of prior experiences. As Burbules and Rice

suggest, "eliciting and honoring the self-expressions of previously silenced partners" may provide a good beginning (1991: 410). A community can exist in spite of conflict, but there must be ways to resolve or manage those conflicts that would impede the group's ability to work together, to communicate, and so on. Complete agreement should not be expected and is not needed. This is a limited community built around specific and limited common interests.

Addressing diversity. Diversity is not a unitary phenomenon; it is also multifaceted. Again, in the context of a limited community, it is well to identify and come to agreement on those aspects of diversity that might appropriately be part of the conversation and the ensuing corrective action, those that might be included but not lead to any action, and those that are not part of the conversation at all. As an example of the second, James Comer (1991) observes that there are differences that are cultural, ethnic, racial, and so on, and differences that impede learning. A misplaced cultural relativism should not prevent action to change the latter.

Nor should undue fears about encroachment in an Other's field of experiential knowledge prevent the voicing of a different perspective. If the experience, the worldview of the Other cannot be understood across difference, then no community is possible. We argue against this solipsism. "Translation" does not have to be perfect for something to be understood. Nor are alternative views inherently racist, prejudiced, or unenlightened. We turn again to Burbules and Rice, who note:

Sometimes an external perspective is helpful precisely

> <u>because</u> it is different from that of the group itself... This endeavor can yield what Walter Feinberg calls 'reflective moments,' opportunities for deeper self-understanding and a release from the commonsense assumptions that typically frame our daily existence. This does not require embracing the other standpoint or letting it supersede our own, but it does stress the value of incorporating that perspective into a more complex and multifaceted framework of understanding." (p. 405)

CONCLUSION

In the end, developing "a more complex and multifaceted framework of understanding" and thus of the ability to engage in equitable relationships across diversity is the goal of the new community. Such communities are not coincident with "society" and its functional imperatives. Rather, what we envision is the emergence of many groups groping toward a limited kind of community, addressing and fostering equity and diversity on different levels, overlapping and interconnected. Here, then, is the source of a new sense of social cohesion originating in "bottom up" rather than a "top down" conceptual and praxis-oriented perspectives.

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FOOTNOTES

1. This does not mean that traditionally defined access should be ignored: while high school graduation rates and achievement test scores for African-Americans have increased substantially, college-going rates have been decreasing. According to Thomas Mortenson, the college graduation rates of African-Americans, compared to those of whites, dropped by about 10 percent between the mid-1960s and 1989 (cited in Shor, 1992: 242).

2. We employ the term "community of learners" here in a generic sense (further explained below), as bodies that operate from a foundation of shared values and commitments. The discussion may be relevant for "learning communities" currently in vogue in higher education, but the two should not be equated. We are concerned about "communities of learners," in the sense of relationships and mechanisms which allow the voices of the previously silenced to emerge. The topic of equity within the educational process is addressed, for instance, by Goodlad (1990) and Connell (1993). The latter advances the notion of "curricular justice." Research has shown that the "disadvantaged" are the best articulators of their own cause--see Williams and Sjoberg, 1993.

3. Karl Marx, Economic and Political Manuscripts, p. 121 in T.B. Bottomore, ed. Karl Marx: Early Writings. London: C.A. Watts, 1963.

4. As a case in point, the long-term effects of state action with regard to desegregation and educational gains for African-Americans have been quite limited. See Williams' (1991) discussion of the implementation (or lack thereof) of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. The author does not take an a priori position antagonistic to a government role in fostering equity, quite the contrary.

5. The shifting proportion of grants versus loans to support college costs provides one indicator of the decreased support for access to higher education. In 1980, 31.5 percent of college freshmen received Pell Grants; the corresponding figure for 1986 was 16.9 percent. In the same years, the percent of freshmen with GSL loans increased from 20.9 to 25.4.

6. Comment by Richard Tucker, chairperson of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, cited in Russell Edgerton (1987), _"The Spring Hill Statement." AAHE Bulletin, 40, 3: 3-4.

7. According to this model, excellence will result from setting high, public standards and linking them to quality control mechanisms such as national tests. Informed consumers of education will then select the wheat from the chaff among institutions. The America 2000 Project, announced by the White House in April 1991, is probably the best known of such initiatives for the K-12 system. It proposed student demonstrations of competence in five core subjects in grades 4, 8, and 12 (see U.S. Department of Education, 1991). National or statewide standardized tests have generally

been opposed by the college outcomes assessment movement, because "teaching to the test" could lead to curricular homogenization and the debasement of "higher" learning. For a review of these issues, see Hutchings and Marchese, 1990; Hutchings, 1990; Keith, 1991, 1993.

8. Note, however, that most programs by this point had a hybrid focus that included professional considerations (i.e. formative assessment for the purpose of improving learning) as well as market ones (external accountability through reporting of assessment efforts and data). See Ewell, Finney, and Lenth, 1990.

9. "New orthodoxy" refers to the social orientation ushered in in the 1980s, espousing such principles as (a) freedom of choice; (b) personal responsibility; (c) income and property as legitimate reflections of one's value to society; (d) limited government, especially pertaining to social services, and so on. We should include here the push for the privatization (vouchers, choice) of education. For a discussion, see Jordan, 1989: ch. 1; Chubb and Moe, 1990.

10. See Offe and Heinze (1992) for a discussion of the alternative economic forms emerging at this time; Falk (1992) and Boyte and Riessman (1986) for socio-political ones.

11. See Richard Falk's latest book, Explorations at the Edge of Time (1992) for some examples of "new" politics, including new social movements, the Greens, and grassroots activism (especially ch. 1, "In Pursuit of the Postmodern" and ch. 5, "Transition to Peace and Justice: The Challenge of Transcendence without Utopia.") This is an informative and insightful book whose quest is "nurturing the new while muting the destructive features of the old partially superseded yet still prevailing political order." (p. 16)

12. Many professional bodies are also following this route, changing their accreditation requirements, for instance, from a prescribed list of courses to a suggested list of outcomes.

13. Industries such as Xerox and the trailblazing Herman Miller (the Michigan visionary furniture makers) are now offering the gospel of worker involvement, teams, and "total quality management" as the new answer to educational excellence. See DePree, 1989; Davis, 1992. For a general discussion, see Senge, 1985. Of course, one must distinguish between the rhetoric and actual transformations.

14. See Torbert (1987). He notes that most Schools of Management are really "schools of capital management." Schools of Self-Management "would place human beings at center" (p. 172). For Torbert "self-management" involves the skills of action-reflection and "skills for 'nonviolently transforming' one's own and others' current practices" (p. 175). The Boston College MBA curriculum is designed to foster democratic self-management.

15. See, for instance, Deal, 1987; Sergiovanni, 1992; Comer, 1990; Rowe, 1992.

16. Thus outcomes assessment, in conception, is quite different from its 1970s relative, "competency-based education," which entailed identifying and testing for a large number of discrete student behavioral objectives and contributed to the trivialization and fragmentation of knowledge.

17. See Heller, 1990. This was in response to the "return to the old community model" supported by Daniel Bell, Peter Berger, and others.

18. Other approaches that integrate assessment into the learning process, such as that of Alverno College (in which the entire curriculum is structured around learning outcomes and assessment, including student self-assessment--see Alverno College, 1976, 1985) or participatory (feminist) assessment, could also potentially be used for the same purpose. Much of our discussion is applicable to them as well. We do not highlight them because their use is not as widespread at the institutional level.

19. The point has been made, by Lee Schulman and others, that, although research is often considered a lonely undertaking, it is often much more collaborative than teaching. Even though many institutions now have Teaching Centers and the like, teaching does not figure prominently in academic conversations.

20. For an account of the growing racial violence on campuses, see Reed, 1991. As is well-known, incidents have been directed at gays and women, as well as African-Americans and other minorities. Intolerance of diversity has increased among the young, including college students, who traditionally had been less likely than the general population to be intolerant.

21. A poll conducted recently for the Anti-Defamation League showed increased levels of intolerance toward African-Americans by under-30 whites. Intolerance was greater among those who felt they had been the victims of reverse discrimination. See "A disturbing trend: Young people are joining older people in accepting intolerance," by Richard Cohen, Philadelphia Inquirer, July 24, 1993: A8.

22. Some colleges, for instance, have created campus-wide committees that include faculty, student life and other non-teaching professionals, under the umbrella of assessing "the undergraduate experience." Hope College includes a strong voice for students in the assessment process.

23. Burbules and Rice, 1991. This well considered article contains much valuable information for anyone attempting such dialogues. See, however, critical rejoinders from a feminist perspective in subsequent issues of the Harvard Educational Review.